

PRE-PUBLICATION EXCERPTS
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**THE CHURCH AS A MOSAIC:
EXERCISES FOR CULTURAL DIVERSITY**
(WORKING TITLE)

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**CHAPTER 4:
THE CHURCH AS A MOSAIC ...
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*We do not want the westernization of the universal Church.
On the other hand we don't want the ecumenical cooks
to throw all the cultural traditions on which they can lay their hands
into one bowl and stir them to a hash of indeterminate colour.*
- John V. Taylor, statesman, Africanist and Bishop of Winchester ⁱ

PRINCIPLES OF MULTI-CULTURAL CHURCHES

A Church of Many Colors (and Multiple Cultures)

Culture. Though the term *multiethnic* church is often used today, researchers prefer the term “*multicultural*,” because *culture* is a more accurate way to describe people who share similar behaviors, ideas, fashion, literature, music, etc. Christian anthropologist Paul Hiebert defined culture as people who join together because of “shared patterns of behavior, ideas and products.”ⁱⁱ

- Behaviors are the way we act,
- Ideas are the way we think, and
- Products are the things we create such as fashion, literature, music, etc.

*Culture: people
who join together
because of
“shared patterns
of behavior, ideas
and products.”
- Paul Hiebert*

Therefore, people of a culture can tell who is in their group and who is out of their group by the way they talk, the way they think and the way they act.

Ethnicity. Ethnicity is a type of culture, often based on biological connections to a geographic area of origin, such as Sri Lankans (from the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka), Yemenis (from the Republic of Yemen) or Chinese (from the People’s Republic of China). But the term ethnicity is very imprecise, because there may be dozens of different ethnic groups that hail from the same area of origin (and thus the term ethnicity is not without controversyⁱⁱⁱ). For instance, China has 50+ recognized ethnic groups but they all originate from the same country.^{iv} While all are Chinese, so too are all 50+ different cultures.^v Since ethnicity is so imprecise, *culture* is usually preferred.

Multicultural or Multiethnic Church? So, what should we call a church that reaches multiple groups of people? And what should we call a neighborhood that has Guatemalan Hispanics, Mexican Hispanics, aging Lutherans and a growing base of

young Anglo professional? The accurate answer is a *multicultural* neighborhood. And, such a mosaic of cultures should give rise to a *multicultural* church.

Below are examples of groups that have been identified as justifiable cultures:

Affinity cultures (these are cultures that are based upon a shared fondness or *affinity*):

- Motorcycle riders
- Country music fans
- The NASCAR nation
- Heavy metal music fans
- Contemporary Christian music fans
- Surfers

Ethnic cultures:

- Latin American,
- Hispanic American
- African American,
- Asian American
- Native American, etc..

Socio-economic cultures^{vi}

- Upper Socio-economic Level^{vii}
- Upper Middle socio-economic Level^{viii}
- Lower Middle Socio-economic Level^{ix}
- Lower Working Socio-economic Level^x
- Lower Socio-economic Level^{xi}

Generational cultures:^{xii}

- Builder^{xiii} (or the Silent^{xiv} or Greatest^{xv}) Generation, b. 1945 and before
- Boomer Generation, b. 1946-1964
- Leading-edge Generation X, b. 1965-1974
- Post-modern Generation X, b. 1975-1983
- Generation Y, b. 1984-2002

Therefore, to help our churches grow in the most ways possible while recognizing the broadest variety of cultures, it is good to speak of *multicultural* churches. These are churches where people from several cultures (e.g. ethnic, affinity, socio-economic, etc.) learn to work together in one church.

ENDNOTES:

Chapter 4:

ⁱ John V. Taylor, "Cultural Ecumenism," *Church Missionary Society Newsletter*, Nov. 1974, p. 3, see also John V. Taylor, *The Theological Basis of Interfaith Dialogue*, in *Faith Meets Faith*, ed. Gerald M. Anderson and Thomas F. Stansky, *Mission Trends*, no. 5 (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), pp. 93ff.

ⁱⁱ Paul Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1976), p. 25.

ⁱⁱⁱ The United Kingdom created controversy when its 2001 census divided ethnicity into the following: White: British, White: Irish, White: Other; Mixed: White and Black Caribbean, Mixed: White and Black African, Mixed: White and Asian, Mixed: Other; Asian: Indian, Asian: Sri Lankan, Asian: Pakistani, Asian: Bangladeshi, Asian: Other; Black or Black British: Black Caribbean, Black or Black British: Black African, Black or Black British: Other, Chinese or Other: Chinese, Chinese or Other: and Other. These designations were still too imprecise for many British residents.

^{iv} *The World Factbook: CIA Edition* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books; Rev Ed, 2006, CIA 2005 Edition).

^v The term ethnicity, while unwieldy and imprecise, is still employed by church leadership writers to describe various cultural heritages, when the more precise term *culture* would be more appropriate, c.f. Kathleen Graces-Foley, *Crossing the Ethnic Divide: The Multiethnic Church on a Mission* (XXX), Mark DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multiethnic Church* (XXX), Gary McIntosh, *Being the Church in a Multi-Ethnic Community: Why It Matters and How It Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012).

^{vi} Joseph V. Hickey and William E. Thompson, *Society in Focus: An Introduction to Sociology* (Boston, Mass.: Allyn & Bacon, 5th ed. 2004).

^{vii} They are approximately 1-5% of the No. American population and are characterized by power over economic, business and political organizations and institutions.

^{viii} They represent approximately 15% of the North American population and are usually white-collar workers who hold graduate degrees, possessing a significant degree of flexibility and autonomy in their work.

^{ix} They are approximately 33% of the North American population and are usually white-collar workers with some college education. Subsequently, they have a degree of flexibility and autonomy at work, though not as much as those of the Upper Middle Socio-economic strata.

^x They are approximately 30% of the North American population). Both white- and blue-collar workers, their jobs are characterized by minimum job security, inadequate pay and worries about losing health insurance.

^{xi} They represent 15% of the North American population and often go through cycles of part-time and full-time jobs. Many times they must work more than one job to provide for their needs.

^{xii} For a chart depicting the different age ranges for each generation see Bob Whitesel *Preparing the Change Reaction: How to Introduce Change in Your Church* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2007), p 53.

^{xiii} Gary McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations: Understanding and Reaching All Ages in Your Church* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2002] and Bob Whitesel and Kent R. Hunter, *A House Divided: Bridging the Generation Gaps in Your Church* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000].

^{xiv} This generation has been labeled various ways, for instance as the “silent generation” by William Strauss and Neil Howe in *Generations: The History of American’s Future, 1954-2069* (New York: Quill, 1992).

^{xv} They are labeled the “greatest generation” by Tom Brokaw in *The Greatest Generation* (New York: Random House, 2004).